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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

29 March 1953

SUBJECT: SE-41: PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN
POSSIBLE UN/US MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION
WITH RESPECT TO THE KOREAN WAR

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable military and political reactions of Communist China and the USSR to certain possible UN/US military courses of action with respect to the Korean war.

Course A -- The UN/US to continue for the foreseeable future military pressure on the enemy at substantially the present level, while building up ROK forces, with a view to possible limited redeployment of US forces from Korea.

Course B -- The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but increase military pressure on the enemy by stepping up ground operations while continuing aggressive air and naval action, with a view to making hostilities more costly to the enemy in the hope that he might agree to an armistice acceptable to the US.

Course C -- The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but continue aggressive air and naval action in Korea while launching a series of coordinated ground operations along the present line followed by a major offensive to establish a line at the waist of Korea, with a view to causing maximum destruction of enemy forces and materiel and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

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Course D -- The UN/US to extend and intensify military pressures on the enemy by stages, including air attack and naval blockade directly against Manchuria and Communist China, and, if required, increased ground operations in Korea, with a view to making hostilities so costly to the enemy that a favorable settlement of the Korean war might be achieved.

Course E -- The UN/US to undertake a coordinated offensive to the waist of Korea, and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to inflicting maximum possible destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea consistent with establishing a line at the waist and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

Course F -- The UN/US to undertake a coordinated, large-scale offensive in Korea and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to the defeat and destruction of the bulk of the Communist forces in Korea and settlement of the Korean war on the basis of a unified, non-Communist Korea.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Course A would almost certainly not induce the Communists to conclude an armistice but might lead them to intensify their military pressure.
2. Course B would probably not induce the Communists to conclude an armistice but would lead to commensurate Communist counter-action.
3. Initiation of Courses C, D, E, or F would probably be interpreted by the Communists as indicating a determination to force a military decision in Korea regardless of cost. The Communists would

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probably also conclude that failure to achieve the desired results by course of action C or course of action D would almost inevitably lead to the adoption of course of action E and then, if necessary, of course of action F. If, before the actual implementation of any of these courses of action, the Communists became convinced that the UN/US had both the determination and the capability to achieve a favorable military decision, there would be a good chance that the Communists would agree to an armistice on present UN terms. However, it would be unsafe to assume that any of these courses of action would, in fact, lead the Communists to make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice. We believe that, once begun, any of these courses of action might lead to general war.

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION: RELATION OF KOREA TO OVER-ALL SOVIET AND CHINESE COMMUNIST OBJECTIVES

4. In order to achieve their over-all objective of weakening and destroying the Western Powers, as well as to consolidate, strengthen, and protect the bases of their power, the USSR and Communist China are united in their intention to expel the West from Asia and particularly from Korea. For the last year, however, they have appeared to be satisfied with the existing military stalemate in Korea, possibly estimating that the US/UN would eventually weary

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of the strain and that a solution could then be obtained leading ultimately to Communist control of all Korea. It is not yet possible to estimate whether the Communist proposals of the last few days represent a shift of Communist tactics.

5. The Communists probably estimate that the Korean war exerts a divisive influence on the Western Powers and that at least during 1953 the UN/US is unlikely to commit the military strength in the Far East necessary to drive the Communists from Korea. At the same time, the Communists probably believe that the UN/US will take actions during 1953 which will increase the costs and risks of the Korean war for the Communists.

6. We believe that during 1953 the Communists will seek to maintain strong military pressure in Korea while retaining a primarily

* The Communists have recently agreed in principle to the exchange of wounded and disabled prisoners of war, and have asked for a resumption of the armistice negotiations. Furthermore, the Soviet government has made several gestures which suggest a desire to relax the present tension between the Soviet Bloc and the West. As yet there is not sufficient evidence to estimate with confidence the meaning of the Soviet gestures or the Communist proposals regarding Korea. We believe, however, that they do not result either from fear of military defeat in Korea or from willingness of the new Soviet rulers to end the East-West struggle. However, the Communist proposals on Korea and the Soviet gestures may mean that the Soviet rulers desire a temporary relaxation of tension, possibly even including an armistice in Korea, during the period when they are consolidating their position in the Bloc. They may believe that such a relaxation would be desirable also as a means of weakening the resolution of the West and of dividing the US from its allies. Therefore, we believe it is possible -- though not probable -- that the desire to win a breathing spell and/or Soviet global policy may lead the Communists to conclude an armistice in Korea.

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defensive posture. At the same time, the Communists will continue to build up their military strength in the Korea-Manchuria area in order to be in a position to exploit any advantage which might develop or to counter possible UN/US intensification or expansion of the war.

7. We believe that the Communist objective to gain control of all Korea will remain unchanged. We also believe, however, that the Communists desire to avoid general war over the Korean issue and that Communist courses of action in Korea will be determined by Communist global interests.

8. Communist reactions to UN/US military initiatives in Korea will be conditioned by the following interests, listed in ascending order of importance to the Communists:

- a. Retention of substantially all Korean territory north of the 38th Parallel.
- b. Survival of a Communist regime in a substantial portion of North Korea.
- c. Maintenance of Communist military and political prestige.*

* The POW issue is an important aspect of Communist interest in retaining military and political prestige. We have estimated in NIE-80, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea Through 1953," 26 March 1953, that "so long as the military stalemate in Korea continues, the Communists are unlikely to make concessions on the POW issue to secure an armistice." However, we have not been able to reach an agreed estimate on the importance of the POW issue in relation to other Communist objectives and interests.

- d. Security of Chinese Communist armed forces in the Korean theater.
- e. Security of the Manchurian industrial complex.
- f. Integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders.

9. Finally, Communist reactions to UN/US courses of action with respect to Korea will be conditioned by the Communist desire to avoid global war over the Korean issue. Because a general war would risk the destruction of the Communist bases of power, we believe that the Communists will attempt to avoid actions in Korea which, in their estimate, would precipitate general war, particularly the commitment of Soviet forces against US forces in UN-held territory or adjacent waters. In any event, we believe that if the USSR did commit Soviet forces in Korea, the USSR would endeavor to place upon the US the responsibility for recognizing such a commitment as casus belli.

10. If prior to the onset of any UN/US military course of action, the Communists were presented with a clear choice between making the concessions necessary to reach an armistice, or accepting the risk that UN/US military operations would endanger the integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders, destroy the Manchurian industrial complex, or destroy the Chinese Communist armed

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forces, the Communists would probably seek an armistice. However, we believe that the Communists doubt the capability and determination of the UN/US to implement courses of action which could accomplish any or all of these. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult to present them with a clear choice of alternatives before such action was begun. Moreover, once such UN/US action was begun, Communist prestige would become further engaged, thereby greatly increasing the difficulties of making the choice between seeking an armistice or continuing the war.

I. PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH DO NOT INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE WAR BEYOND KOREA

Course A -- The UN/US to continue for the foreseeable future military pressure on the enemy at substantially the present level, while building up ROK forces, with a view to possible limited redeployment of US forces from Korea.

11. Communist China and the USSR would probably not be able initially to interpret the intent of the UN/US build-up for such a course of action. The Communists might consider that the UNC were either gradually building up for greatly intensified hostilities, or merely building up ROK strength so that the US could disengage its forces from Korea and end its present maldployment of power in the Far East.

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12. In any event, the Communists would almost certainly continue to build up their military strength in the Korea-Manchuria area for any eventuality, and, once it became clear that the US was withdrawing forces, would almost certainly seek to exert additional military pressure in Korea. The Communists would probably estimate that such a UN/US course of action would not threaten any of their principal interests in Korea, and therefore they would almost certainly not feel compelled to make concessions to secure an armistice.

13. Course A would probably have little or no immediate effect upon Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

Course B -- The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but increase military pressure on the enemy by stepping up ground operations while continuing aggressive air and naval action, with a view to making hostilities more costly to the enemy in the hope that he might agree to an armistice acceptable to the US.

Course C -- The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but continue aggressive air and naval action in Korea while launching a series of coordinated ground operations along the present line followed by a major offensive to establish a line at the waist of Korea, with a view to causing maximum destruction of enemy forces and materiel and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

* See NIE-80, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea Through 1953", for a discussion of Communist military capabilities in Korea.

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14. The Communists would probably not be able initially to interpret UN/US intention with regard to these alternative courses of action. They would probably base their estimate on the size and composition of the UN/US build-up for these intensified military operations and on the degree of mobilization within the US.

15. If, prior to actual initiation of such military operations, the Communists should become convinced that the strength and determination of the UN powers were sufficient to endanger their principal interests in the Korean theater, they would probably make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice. We believe it much more likely, however, that the Communists would estimate that the UN/US build-up and determination for these proposed alternatives were not great enough to sustain military operations which would seriously threaten these interests.

16. The initial Communist reaction, once such military operations had begun, would be to counter vigorously. The Chinese Communists would probably make a maximum ground defense effort against these UNC operations, and would probably also launch strong counter-offensives. They would probably make a maximum air defense effort over Communist-held territory and might launch air strikes against UNC amphibious operations. During the first phases

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of the action, the Communists would probably not commit the Communist Air Force in China (CAFIC) to large-scale operations over UN-held territory, and would almost certainly not commit Soviet ground forces in Korea or Soviet air forces over UN-held territory. We believe that the Communists would accept substantial losses of men and materiel in countering or containing these UNC operations. We are unable to estimate how great these losses could become before the Communists would feel compelled to seek an armistice.

17. If UN forces launched a general offensive, as contemplated in Course C, and the Communists estimated that they would be unable to halt the UN advance without expanding the war, they might accept the risks of general war involved by committing their air force unreservedly over UN-held territory and introducing Soviet ground units to stiffen the Communist defense. We believe it more likely, however, that they would be willing to accept an armistice involving territorial losses and UN conditions on the POW issue.

18. If the Communists accepted heavy losses and continued resistance while retreating northward and if UN/US forces then halted and established a defensive line at the waist, the Communists would probably attempt to reconstitute their forces in order to contain further UN advances and in order to prepare for future

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attempts to drive UN forces from North Korea. We are unable to estimate whether, in these circumstances, the Communists would accept a military and political stalemate along the new line or make the concessions necessary to reach the armistice.

19. The Communists would probably react to these alternative UN/US courses of action by intensifying their peace campaign and seeking to weaken the determination of the UN nations in Korea.

20. Courses B and C would probably not affect Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

II. PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE KOREAN WAR

Course D-- If the UN/US were to extend and intensify military pressures on the enemy by stages, including air attack and naval blockade directly against Manchuria and Communist China, and, if required, increased ground operations in Korea, with a view to making hostilities so costly to the enemy that a favorable settlement of the Korean war might be achieved.

Course E-- If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated offensive to the waist of Korea, and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to inflicting maximum possible destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea consistent with establishing a line at the waist and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

Course F-- If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated, large-scale offensive in Korea and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to the defeat and destruction of the bulk of the Communist forces in Korea and settlement of the Korean war on the basis of a unified, non-Communist Korea.

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21. If, prior to actual initiation of such military operations, the Communists should become convinced that the strength and determination of the UN powers were sufficient to endanger their principal interests in the Korean theater, they would probably make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice.

22. If, as a result of Communist miscalculation of UN/US capabilities and intentions, or because the Communists were not willing to make the compromises necessary to obtain an armistice, the war were expanded to Manchuria and China proper, the Communists would almost certainly assume, particularly if UN ground forces launched large-scale attacks in Korea, that the UN/US was prepared to accept any risk in order to drive the Communists from Korea and to destroy the military and industrial potential of Communist China. The Communists would almost certainly assume that any UNC air attacks against Manchuria or China would sooner or later include air attacks against their industrial complex.

23. We believe that in response to the initiation of any of these courses of action, the Communists would offer maximum resistance, including greatly increased Soviet participation in the air defense of Manchuria and China proper and CAFIC attacks on UN forces and bases in the Korean and China theaters. We believe that so long as they were able to maintain the security of their forces in Korea,

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inflict serious losses on the UN air forces attacking China and Manchuria, and protect Manchurian industry, the Communists would not be willing to sacrifice any of their important interests in Korea in order to obtain an armistice. * Under these circumstances, their unwillingness to compromise their position in Korea would be strengthened if their political and psychological countermeasure appeared to have the effect of significantly reducing UN and/or US determination to sustain an expanded war in the Far East.

24. If, however, in the implementation of any of the above courses of action, the Communists were unable to counter UN/US air operations against Manchuria and if it appeared to the Communists that the Manchurian industrial complex was threatened with destruction, we believe that the Communists, if given the opportunity, would be willing to sacrifice some of their interests in Korea in order to obtain a cessation of hostilities. If simultaneously with air attacks on Manchuria and China proper, UN/US forces were advancing in North Korea, the Communists while seeking to negotiate an armistice that secured continued Communist control

* SE-37, "Probable Effects on the Soviet Bloc of Certain Courses of Action Directed at the Internal and External Commerce of Communist China", dated 9 March 1953, concludes that a large scale and sustained air and naval bombardment of key Chinese Communist transportation lines, in conjunction with a naval blockade, would not in itself induce the Communists to accept a Korean settlement on UN terms.

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over a substantial portion of North Korea, might commit Soviet air units over UN-held territory and might introduce Soviet ground forces into Korea. The USSR would, in any event, leave to the UN/US the responsibility for recognizing the commitment of Soviet forces as a casus belli.

25. Although we believe these UN/US courses of action would impose severe strains on Sino-Soviet relations, we do not believe that these courses of action would cause the Chinese Communist leadership to alter basically its alignment with the USSR.

III. EMPLOYMENT OF ATOMIC WEAPONS

26. If atomic weapons were employed by US/UN forces in any of the above alternative courses of action, we believe that the Communist reaction would be in large part determined by the extent of military damage inflicted. However, we believe that the Communists would recognize the use of atomic weapons as indicative of Western determination to carry the Korean war to a successful conclusion. We are unable to estimate whether this recognition would lead the Communists to make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice.

IV. NON-PARTICIPATION OF UN POWERS

27. If UN powers refused to participate in these courses of action, the Communists would be encouraged to resist in the hope of further straining US relations with its western allies and in

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the hope that US determination to sustain the war alone would falter. The Communists would also feel that the risks of general war would be lessened and therefore they would be less restrained in their military reactions against US operations. If the Communists failed to produce a complete breach in the western alliances and failed to defeat or contain unilateral US military efforts, they would probably react to the various alternative courses of action as described above.

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